DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 411 015 JC 970 489

TITLE	The Academic Senate Perspective on the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (HR 3734, The Welfare Reform Act).
INSTITUTION	Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, Sacramento.
PUB DATE	1997-06-00
NOTE	15p.; A concept paper developed by the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Change Strategies; *College Role; Community Colleges; Curriculum Development; *Education Work Relationship; Educational Change; Educational Finance; Educational Needs; *Job Training; Two Year Colleges; *Welfare Recipients
IDENTIFIERS	*California Community Colleges; Personal Responsibility and Work Opp Recon Act; *Welfare Reform

ABSTRACT

The Welfare Reform Act of 1996, with its emphasis on mandatory work, will have a serious impact on communities throughout California. In 1995-96, a total of 760,000 people received Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), while 139,713 of these were community college students. To respond to the Act, the California Community Colleges should develop additional funding sources and maintain flexibility in allocating funds; ensure that AFDC students and the revenue that they generate are retained; and maintain quality in serving additional welfare recipients, specifically regarding a likely corresponding increase in demand for health services. At the local level, colleges should work with area agencies to create jobs that provide adequate compensation and self-esteem and lead directly from educational programs. Educational programs should be designed that provide all citizens with adaptable and transferable skills, with special care being taken to ensure that curricula provide training within the timeline allotted for receiving welfare by the Act. Programs should also remain open to all and assess competencies to ensure graduates' employability. Finally, local academic senates should take a leadership role in ensuring that colleges retain and attract welfare recipients. Contains 18 recommendations for local academic senates. (BCY)

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The Academic Senate Perspective On The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996

(HR 3734, The Welfare Reform Act)

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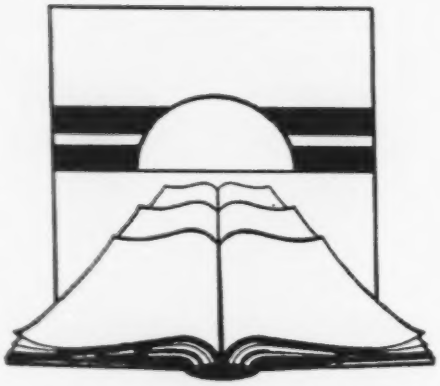

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A concept paper developed by the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges

June 7, 1997

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Introduction

The Welfare Reform Act will have a serious impact on communities throughout the state of California. The bill eliminates the open-ended federal entitlement program of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and creates a block grant for states to provide time-limited cash assistance for needy families. Through these block grants, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) will consolidate programs such as AFDC, Emergency Assistance (EA), and Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS). The moneys for these programs are fixed and no additional revenues will be available if case loads increase. Flexibility in the administration of this program is necessary as the state will make decisions on the allocation of funds for various welfare components such as support services, education and training, cash benefits, and state and county overhead.

The bill places a clear emphasis on work. Mandatory work participation rates start at 25% for 1997 with 5% annual increases to 50% by 2002. Two-parent family participation rates start at 75% and move to 90%. Work participation requirements are 35 hours per week for two parent families and 20 hours per week for single parents. By the year 2000 the participation requirement will increase to 30 hours per week for single parents. States must meet an 80% maintenance-of-effort to receive their full block grant allocation, reduced to 75% if the work participation rate requirement is met. Penalties will be imposed (beginning at 5%) if rates are not met--with minimal exemptions available (states may continue existing waivers and are limited to 15% of caseload). Welfare recipients must engage in work activities within 2 years. This 2-year period begins July 1st for current AFDC recipients. Allowable work participation activities include[1]:

- unsubsidized public or private sector employment;
- subsidized public or private sector employment;
- work experience, only if sufficient private sector employment is not available;
- on the job training;
- job search and readiness assistance (up to 6 weeks maximum);
- community service;
- vocational education (up to 12 months; cannot exceed 20% of total recipients);
- job skills training directly related to employment;
- high school or GED preparation; and
- provision of child care to an individual participating in a community service program.

This legislation puts limits on assistance to legal immigrants and terminates their availability for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and food stamps benefits effective on August 23rd of this year. There is a 5 year lifetime limit with no federal cash assistance after 5 cumulative years.

A total of 760,000 people receive AFDC statewide. The 1995-1996 figures show that 139,713 (18.3% of the total State AFDC recipients) are community college students. There are approximately 127,000 non-GAIN students voluntarily enrolled in community colleges (90.8% of the AFDC recipients enrolled in community colleges). GAIN students accounted for 9.1% of AFDC recipients enrolled in community colleges (12,834 students)[2].

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Two-thirds of AFDC recipients are minorities, evenly distributed among blacks, Asians, and Latinos and 77% are citizens. Three-fourths are high school graduates, and four out of five are women[3]. AFDC recipients who earn a degree increase their annual earnings over the next three years by over $11,000, almost 2½ times their pre-graduation wages[4].

Welfare reform will have a significant impact on these students and the communities that community colleges serve. There is a great deal that we can and should do in meeting the challenges of welfare reform, especially in assisting welfare recipients in moving from welfare to self-sufficiency.

Issues for California Community Colleges

The changes in the welfare system will have a strong impact on community colleges. We must articulate these issues clearly and forcefully as legislation moves forward to implement California's plan.

Sources of Funding

The Governor's Budget[5] provides $63.2 million of the California Community College's Proposition 98 allocation for education, training, and support services for TANF recipients enrolled at our colleges. Additional services to TANF recipients should not be supported solely with Prop 98 funds. This would mean the disenfranchisement of current students to provide largely non-instructional services (coordination, child care, job development and placement). Traditionally, some educational dollars have been used for these purposes, and the system is prepared to do its part to serve TANF students. However, Prop 98 funds will be insufficient for the magnitude of the task. Services over and above the current level being provided should be funded from sources outside the system. Particularly, a portion of the federal block grant funds should be made available for this expansion of services. The amount of funds available for expanded TANF student services should be determined *after* system needs for COLA, growth, equalization, instructional equipment, and new faculty needs are met.

Funds should be allocated to districts based on the number of TANF students served. Districts should retain flexibility in the use of funds, with allowable uses including the following[1,6,7]:

- coordination of services by adequate support staff
- support services and curriculum development
- support for additional students who receive welfare benefits and become part of the community college system
- work study and related services
- expanded subsidized child care
- staff development activities related to welfare reform
- expanded job development and job placement
- post-employment training

Districts are encouraged to pursue additional funds from grants, partnerships with business and industry, and other sources to leverage dollars allocated from state and federal funds to serve TANF students.

Retaining Currently Enrolled AFDC Students

The currently-enrolled 140,000 AFDC students constitute 90,000 FTES or $380 million in funding to the system. Loss of these students would create a tremendous financial hardship on the community college system, not to mention the estrangement of students from the major provider of vocational education in the state. Some currently discussed proposals place the continued enrollment of these students at risk.

The Governor's proposal[8] calls for recipients to be involved in work activities within 12 months rather than the federal requirement of 24 months. Education and training resulting in effective job skills will require much more than 12 months for most TANF recipients. Consensus must be developed and advanced to modify the Governor's proposal to the federal limit of 24 months.

Moreover, those TANF students who enroll and make satisfactory progress toward a degree or certificate should be allowed to continue their education even if more than 24 months elapse. The system should develop a proposal to permit the use of the state waiver process to exempt such students from the 24 month limitation.

One of the most effective front-end education and job training programs in the state has been the GAIN program, currently serving some 13,000 AFDC students. The federal block grant mechanism has ended categorical funding for GAIN, currently based on a match of $8 million in federal funds with $8 million in Prop 98 funds. Agreements currently being discussed with the Department of Social Services which would maintain this funding should be supported.

Maintaining Quality in Serving Additional TANF Recipients

To continue to be eligible for assistance, TANF recipients must be involved in work activities within 24 months. The reality will be that education and training will need to continue beyond the 24 month limitation and into the work activity phase for the recipient. It is to the advantage of the system and the recipient that training not be a "revolving door" which puts the recipient back out on the street with inadequate skills to find and hold a job and with eligibility for further training used up. Thus community college should press for maximum flexibility in defining allowable work activities that include: work study, cooperative education, internships, community service.

Pressure will be placed on community colleges to serve additional TANF recipients using narrowly focused "quick fix" techniques common to some for-profit training institutions. The community colleges must remain committed to academic rigor and integrity in expanding programs and services to meet the needs of TANF students. Critical thinking and a firm foundation in the principles of the content area in which the student is being educated is essential. Without such a broad-based

foundation, students may be able to enter the job market but will be unable to advance or, in some cases, even continue to hold that job. The pace of change in job skills within California's heavily technology- and service-oriented economy is such that workers must have the ability to adjust and adapt rapidly. Community college should continue to press for state commitment to high-skill, high-level education and training for the work force.

One effect which is anticipated in serving more students from this population is an increased demand for health services. Students who reach the end of their TANF eligibility and those who will not be eligible for SSI benefits beyond this August will lose their MediCal benefits. Districts with health care services for students currently charge a fee not to exceed $10 for that service. However, students who can demonstrate need sufficient to obtain a Board of Governor's fee waiver do not have to pay that fee. Even with reduced income from fees, districts are required to maintain the level of heath services provided to students. With the expectation that most former TANF and SSI recipients would be eligible for BOG waivers, it is possible that an already overly-stressed community college health service system could reach the breaking point. It is essential that this dilemma be resolved as soon as possible. Community colleges should continue to press for solutions such as the proposed $6.4 million back fill legislation passed last year but vetoed by the Governor.

Areas for Design of a Local College Project

Job Creation

Moving citizens from welfare to work will require a tremendous state-wide effort to create jobs into which TANF recipients can move. The life situations which have not enabled these citizens to be part of the work force are many and varied. No one program can meet all those needs. As a result, it is essential that the intake process assess the full gamut of needs and construct a service plan, tailored to the individual, to meet those needs. (See the section below on Support Services.) A key aspect of this plan will be matching the individual's skills and interest to the occupations where jobs will be available.

Consequently, community colleges must work cooperatively with local agencies, particularly the Department of Social Services, the Employment Development Department, Private Industry Councils, and Community Based Organizations, to identify areas of existing job openings and those in which job creation efforts might be useful. Community college vocational education advisory committees will be an essential resource in this process.

There are several critical factors to keep in mind as community colleges move to bolster job creation. First, compensation for such positions must be sufficient to support individuals and their families. Due to the fact that, on the average (with considerable regional variability), approximately $17/hour[9] is required to support a family of three (the median family size of TANF recipients) ***this will be a major undertaking***. This means that we are not talking about dead-end "McJobs" with little or no chance for advancement to the needed salary level. Opportunity for upward mobility is a must.

Second, the jobs created must provide self-esteem to the worker. Many in the TANF recipient pool have had negative experiences with the work place and will be motivated to pursue the new opportunities presented only if they are viewed as a positive contribution to their self-worth.

Proposals have been advanced to add more publicly-funded jobs to meet the huge need. The California Conservation Corps (CCC) has been mentioned in this regard. Positive aspects of this approach include providing essential expansion of the number of new jobs, providing "how to hold a job" skills to many who have never worked for pay, and the positive contribution to the community that such labor provides. Making effective use of this approach may necessitate some changes in the CCC program. Rather than just providing labor, an individual's work in the program should be connected to the service plan designed for that individual. The work itself should provide skill-building opportunities. In addition, the jobs with the CCC should be viewed as transitional. Overall, the time spent within the CCC program should be integrated into the individual's service plan to move that person forward to a rewarding, self-sustaining career.

Third, educational training programs must lead directly to employment. With a lifetime training eligibility period of only 24 months, students will have essentially one chance to be trained for gainful employment. A key strategy to provide this connection is the Work Opportunity Agreement.[10] Through these agreements with employers of program graduates, students are assured a job in their field of training and employers are assured that their new employees will have the desired skills.

A factor often overlooked is that the geographic location of job opportunities often does not match the location of those seeking work in those fields. A mandated component of the local college project should be assistance in identifying jobs at sites throughout the state and assistance in relocating qualified individuals to those areas.

Provisions for maintaining eligibility for benefits include volunteer community service. This certainly is a positive contribution in service to others, particularly if provision of child care is emphasized. As with public service employment, volunteer public service should be viewed as transitional, should contribute to skill building, and should be part of the service plan for the individual.

Educational Program Design

The hallmark of programs to assist citizens in moving from welfare to work should be to provide adaptable, transferrable skills. Several steps will be addressed to assure the effectiveness of educational programs in meeting the needs of this population.

- assess student skills, abilities, and learning styles
- package existing courses and create new courses to reach job growth areas and provide student skills

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- coordinate special and categorical programs with existing and redesigned educational programs
- assess student competencies to assure that needed job skills are obtained
- issue existing certificates and newly designed certificates to acknowledge student competencies

While intake processes will address a wide variety of recipient needs, certainly education and training requirements will be central. (See the section on Support Services to reference other needs.) Designing the educational component of the service plan should begin with assessment of basic skills (using current matriculation services). Opportunity should be provided for non-traditional alternative skills demonstrations such as portfolios (as in the use of multiple measures for placement).

Also included should be a learning skills assessment (also a part of matriculation services). Besides providing assessment, most community colleges provide a variety of courses in learning and study skills. When a need is identified, such course work should be included early-on in the educational component of the service plan (called the student education plan, or SEP, in the matriculation process). In summary, local college projects should supplement basic skills assessment with learning and study skills assessment and include appropriate course work in the student's service plan.

Curriculum design is a second key factor. Many existing programs already directly meet welfare-to-work needs. As growing job markets are identified, curriculum will be created and/or amended. The local college project should devote resources to assessing the appropriateness of existing programs to meet, in particular, job market needs for welfare-to-work. New and revised courses should have the opportunity for speedy review and approval, while maintaining quality academic standards. Similarly, new programs should be reviewed and approved in a timely manner.

Because of the short time line during which TANF recipients remain eligible for benefits while receiving training, a major theme of the curriculum design mentioned above will be strategies to meet that tight time frame. The local college project should explore curriculum strategies such as:

- short-term high-impact scheduling,
- content revisions integrating basic skills, learning skills, SCANS* job skills, cross-cultural communication, and vocational/academic subject matter,
- block enrollment, and
- learning communities (such as common-interest support groups).

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*Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills

Next, special and categorical programs should be coordinated with existing and redesigned educational programs. These include:

- Workforce Preparation (such as School-to-Work, VATEA, JTPA),
- Immigrant Education,
- Citizenship Centers,
- Work Experience,
- special population programs such as Puente,
- Work Study, and
- Peer Tutoring.

To the extent that these programs can address welfare-to-work needs within their mandated scope, curriculum design should unify these efforts. For example, Work Experience credit could be targeted to employers in areas where job development and growth is expected, or Work Study experiences could give on-the-job support to SCANS competencies taught in the curriculum.

A fundamental principle which should remain in place is maintaining open access to all programs, including those intended for TANF recipients. Local college projects should not create programs which isolate TANF recipients. The use of open-access courses does not, of course, preclude the design of specific courses, such as colloquia, which bring together common-interest groups which include TANF recipients. Nor does it preclude the provision of counseling and other support services targeted at such common-interest groups. By all means, local college project curriculum designs should build upon the outstanding models currently used by programs such as GAIN**.

Proficiency of students in preparing for the job market must be guaranteed. Because TANF recipients face a life-time limitation in eligibility for training, community college programs must assure that students acquire skills and knowledge that make them employable. This process should begin with establishing program-level competencies which are developed by discipline faculty with the full involvement of practitioners in business and industry. As the impact of welfare reform is addressed, local college projects should work with the appropriate advisory committees to reaffirm or revise program competencies. To better serve the needs of TANF recipients, this review of competencies might best be supplemented with additional expertise, such as instructors in GAIN and counselors with planning and job placement experience.

**Greater Avenues for Independence

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Assessment of these competencies should take place within the courses themselves rather than establishing a system of exit skills testing which students would be required to pass before being granted a degree or certificate. It is recommended that instructors within courses make use of a variety of assessment methods including skills demonstration and portfolios. Further, a logical design would dictate similar methodologies for assessment upon intake and for course completion competencies. For example, a student in a graphic arts program might be assessed using a portfolio of work products (for content areas) and writing samples and oral presentations (for basic communication skills). To the extent possible, these assessments should be directly related to job skills.

Certificates are awarded to students signifying readiness for the job market. Full certificates for educational programs are approved by the Chancellor's Office for 18 credit units or more. Discussions are currently underway at the state level to provide proficiency certificates which would allow recognition of incremental progress toward full job readiness. For example, a proficiency certificate might be designed to recognize mastery of SCANS competencies.

Support Services

To be successful, students need many kinds of support. Upon intake, the needs of TANF recipients should be further assessed in areas including:

- child care,
- transportation,
- job skills,
- motivation,
- disabilities
- family support, and
- need for employee assistance programs (substance abuse, family situations, psychological counseling).

Meeting such needs involves three phases:

- assessment and referral,
- contact and maintenance, and
- compliance monitoring.

Assessment of support service needs will require cooperation among the Department of Social Services and the community college district, regardless of which is the lead agency. Once the recipient's needs are identified, comprehensive information should be provided about services available. The recipient should be allowed to make an informed choice, and the lead agency should facilitate both the referral and the specific client-provider agreement. The client should then have an individualized service plan constructed from the "menu" of choices.

It is essential that the recipient commit to following through with active participation in all elements of the service plan. For example, a person who ignores a critical family problem will soon find that situation interfering with educational progress. DSS and the community college should maintain contact with the student about the adequacy of support services and intervene if problems arise. Similar cooperation is needed to assure that the student complies with conditions to continue eligibility for benefits. If a student has committed to work study and does not show up on time on a regular basis, the student should be held accountable.

Community colleges have a long history of providing vocational education to the broadest range of California's citizens. Experience has shown that designing a service plan which meets the needs of the whole individual is most effective to provide that person with an employable skill, to provide business and industry with a trained workforce, and to prove California with an educated, informed, citizenry.

Recommendations to Local Academic Senates

In order to respond to the needs of the community, the Executive Committee of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges suggests to local academic senates that they consider the following recommendations in taking a leadership role to assure that their community colleges maintain current enrollments of welfare recipients and attract recipients to the system.

1. Coordinate student services and instruction to provide non-credit short term vocational training and a credit curriculum that will lead to short term (one-year, 18-to-24 unit) certificates. These certificates should articulate within a tiered system from job-entry at a competency level to education resulting in full proficiency. This tiered system should articulate smoothly through the associate degree and transfer levels. Entry level programs should be recognized as transitional so the students will be able to progress in training and employment to meaningful wages levels.

2. Expand outreach programs to TANF recipients who are not currently enrolled in the community college system but who will need short term training to obtain employment.

3. Promote to potential TANF students (and expand as needed) the variety of curriculum delivery modes available at the college: short term courses, modular courses, open entry/open exit programs, self-paced courses, computer aided instructed courses, and technologically mediated instruction where students come to sites to access a variety of equipment.

4. Provide potential TANF students with access to college services through an intake coordinators who can provide information about resources such as child care, financial aid, personal, educational and career counseling, GAIN, EOP&S, DSP&S, admissions, assessment and job placement.

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5. Promote to potential TANF students (and expand as needed) the ancillary support services that can address the following needs: transportation, reentry, tutoring, crisis intervention, learning disabilities, child care and parent education, citizenship classes.

6. Establish career service teams that will coordinate transfer/career counseling, job placement, and vocational liaison activities. These teams should also focus on the development of work participation plans/activities that include cooperative education, internships, service learning, college work-study, job skills readiness, job retention, and life skills activities.

7. Establish Welfare-to-Work Teams at each college and develop college action plans. (See the California Community Colleges Questions and Answers on Welfare Reform Initiatives for suggested activities.)

8. Develop partnerships with other groups, i.e., County Department of Social Services, Employment Development Department, Adult Education, City Government, Community Based Organizations, particularly in activities 2, 4, and 6 above.

9. Establish and strengthen existing partnerships with business and industry to create sponsorship, internship, work experience programs, and Work Opportunity Agreements.

10. Develop college calendars, in concert with bargaining units, to enhance college flexibility in serving TANF recipients.

11. Focus on overall economic development of the communities with large numbers of welfare recipients. Understand that the community will become disenfranchised as a result of a large number of their community members not receiving benefits that provide for basic things like food and shelter.

12. Develop a broad view of the community that is affected by the reform and develop curriculum that focuses on serving the needs of those individuals, i.e., basic skills, post-employment training, and employability skills, particularly SCANS competencies (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills).

13. Maintain a receptive college culture so students will thrive in the academic environment.

14. Provide professional development activities for faculty and staff that will enhance their awareness of the needs of this student population.

15. Present Welfare Reform Workshops.

16. Present Welfare Reform Panels to review and discuss state and local issues.

17. Support legislation to allow current AFDC students to complete their education. (See SB 169, Solis.)

18. Explore legislation for pilot educational programs to provide training for infant and toddler care providers.

Endnotes

1. "Analysis of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996," August 30, 1996, National Governors' Association, National Conference of State Legislatures; and American Public Welfare Association.

2. "California Community Colleges - Welfare Reform Initiatives Questions and Answers," March 5, 1997 (No. 1), Chancellor's Office Student Services Unit.

3. "Educating Welfare Recipients in California Community Colleges," Chancellor's Office, May 1997.

4. "Earnings Gain for AFDC and NonAFDC Leavers, Last Year in College to 3rd Year Out of College," Chancellor's Office, April 1997.

5. May revise.

6. "Report of the Consultation Task Force on Welfare Reform," December 19, 1996.

7. "Welfare Reform" in "Weekly E-Mail Update," March 21, 1997, Tom Nussbaum.

8. "Summary of the Governor's Proposed Budget on Welfare Reform," Orange County Social Services Agency.

9. Controller's Quarterly," Kathleen Connell, March 1997

10. "Work Opportunity Agreements" in "Moving Students from Welfare to Work in the California Community Colleges," Chancellor's Office, November 1996.